

HAND IN GLOVE:

Photographs, Essays, Poems



PREFACE

Though we enjoyed working with him in PFS, the darkness around Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum was profound. Expressed astrologically (though Jeremy himself considered astrology a pseudo-science), Jeremy was born with the sun in Cancer; and the planet Saturn was also in Cancer, forming a tight conjunction with his sun (6-27-74). Translated into practical terms, no matter how much artifice he joyfully and willfully imposed on those around him, there was always something eating away at his peace of mind. He was never comfortable, nor was he willing to comfort anyone else. He wasn't a drug abuser, but he was a heavy drinker—and, when he had wheels, he drove drunk. Many times I refused to get in the car with drunken Jeremy at the wheel—Mike and Nick didn't, necessarily. The three of them weren't always moored to any healthy shore.

Jeremy's obsession with adolescents and adolescence was also creepish—he was compulsively opposed to adult behaviors and concerns. Still, in this handful of photographs, we see all that was best in Jeremy—the offhanded and effortless ability to shock through novel perspectives and compositions; an electric charge around bisexual eroticism and even troilism; and a sense of Philadelphia itself as a love object, to be wooed, fondled, and bedded. I named this collection “Hand in Glove” after the Smiths’ song; and it needs to be said that Smiths/ Morrissey fandom was an extreme fetish for Mr. Tenenbaum. He was known (he hastened to tell anyone who inquired) as one of the great Smiths authorities on the Eastern seaboard. Every time Morrissey released an album it was an event—more than once, I celebrated the occasion with Jeremy in Manayunk. Jeremy was a man of compartments, and the Smiths/Morrissey compartment was a large one; the “murderous desire for love” from “The Boy with the Thorn in His Side” was his too.

It also needs to be noted that Jeremy began as a poet. At Villanova University in the Philly suburbs, under the tutelage of Dr. Eli Goldblatt (who later migrated to Temple while I was there and briefly served on my committee), he studied Modernist poetry intensively, with a special emphasis on Ezra Pound. Jeremy was at home with Pound’s Cantos and “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,” and never lost a Poundian bias where poetics were concerned. Around the turn of the century, he was twice published in the Columbia Poetry Review, a mid-level avant-garde print journal out of Columbia University Chicago. What he thought of my books I’ll never know—by the time the books began to appear, he had disowned me. He had also stepped up his drinking and grown portly. I learned through the grapevine that he was working on an epic novel, under the twisted, cacophonous influence of Thomas

Pynchon (“Gravity’s Rainbow” was another fetish for him) and John Barth. I knew Jeremy was on a downward trajectory and guessed the novel would never appear, and it didn’t. He probably counted (knowing his perversity) on posthumous publication.

Posturing in these photos is kept to a minimum, and what we have is an eye for quirk, oddity, and what chance circumstances create which is worth capturing and preserving. If we never quite see the “murderous desire for love” emerge, Jeremy might’ve left something in his files to take care of that later. However painful and tawdry some of his life might’ve been, there is still the sense, for those of us who knew and intermittently loved him, that Jeremy, with his penchant for generating shocks and surprises, might have more worthwhile material waiting for us somewhere. Jeremy approved of the Pynchonian trope of the secret underground conspiracy and/or system, and perhaps his is only beginning to operate.

Adam Fieled



On “Portrait: Two Girls in a Bed” by Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum

Shock, Sigmund Freud wrote, is the necessary precursor to orgasm. I do not remember the source text, or the context. It is interesting to consider the implications of this remark— why, if we grant Freud his premise, sharp and pungent sensations experienced by the brain can produce correspondingly extreme physical reactions. One implication concerns art, whose task it is to create and sustain sharp and pungent brain sensations, which can resound physically as well. What could be more shockingly sharp, and pungent, than queerness doubled, then re-doubled *ad infinitum*? Here, in Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum’s “Portrait: Two Girls in a Bed,” queerness has the potentiality not only to signify lesbianism but the queer, as in the strange, the eerie, the noir, even (from the perspective of stability and standardized portraiture expectations) the disconsolate. This is, to paraphrase Barthes, not a

work of standardized pleasure but of forceful (perhaps fearful), shock-inducing bliss. The foreplay it forces is to watch singles double and significations in general multiply (as questions self-generate, it is easy to imagine the photo a newfangled Grecian Urn)—whether the girls are lovers or not, and why one is fully dressed and the other nude; why the artist has created, out of his own shocking perversity, a perspective from which the girls are watching something we can't see, what it might be and what their shocks are against ours; how the exterior, red walls of the bedroom (which are shocking to begin with) have metaphorical, physical and metaphysical doubles in several directions (once the triangle is formulated of the artist and the two girls); and the pure, blunt attractiveness of the nude wrapped in a bed-sheet in the foreground, whose bulging blue eyes have in them an intimation which splits between physical violence and orgasmic release (and over whom a projection of “butch” or “butchness” may or may not apply).

The girl in a bed-sheet covers one level of singular meaning—that she is the muse of the photo. She is, in fact, a muse worthy of Manet—frank, but with a streak of coyness which elevates her over Olympia; and as breathtaking, in this context, as the mistress of Luncheon on the Grass. If she, and this piece, resonates as contemporary in 2013, it is because photography as a medium, particularly American photography, is customarily not rich enough, formally or thematically, to carry the nuances, innovations, or multiple meanings of classic and classicist European art. Multiple meanings and nuances don't have to create a sense of the ponderous (as Americans are wont to suggest); here, as in Abby Heller-Burnham's “The Walls Have Ears,” the shock tactics employed engender not only arousal (sexual, emotional, and/or intellectual) but giddiness, the aesthetic equivalent of a line of cocaine (the sight of which was no stranger to Freud). To speak in the parlance of Center City Philadelphia, it can get you high, and off.

The evidence is irrefutable—no one who has ever been shocked into an awareness of their physical sexual instincts is unfamiliar with queerness. Sex is strange. While you gaze at your lovers, they're looking at something or someone else. Another jolt into awareness: who has more power, the nude or the clothed? Intermittent or partial nudity has many shocks built into it—one reason Tenenbaum makes Robert Mapplethorpe's nudes look unimaginative, cold, and clinical. New York's cocaine buzzes around the arts have always been cold ones; Philadelphia in the Aughts (when this was taken) was warmer, stranger, and giddier. The seeds it planted towards further multiplications have only begun to blossom,

against the American grain and producing the necessary friction for meaningful conception to occur.

Adam Fieled



ON “SOUTH PHILLY POWER LINES” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

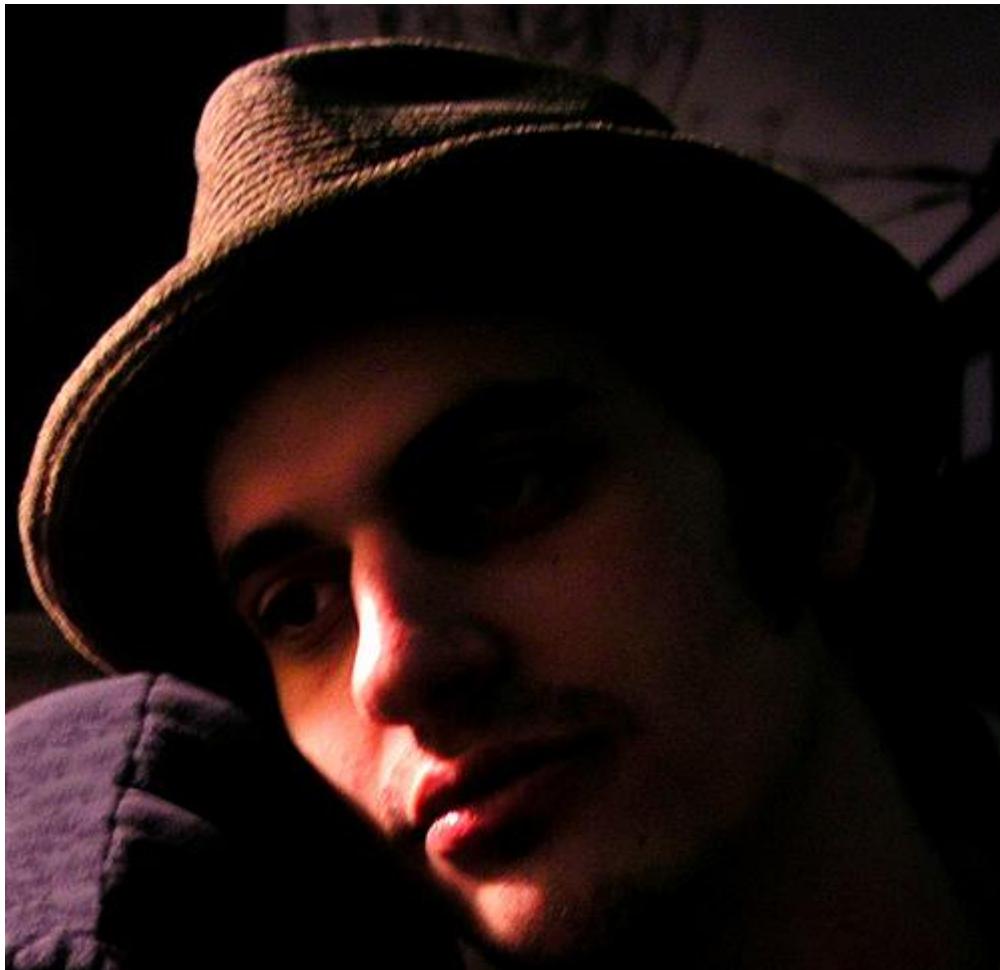
To conventional wisdom, the poetry of the American urban landscape is that there is none. The average American metropolitan area is an ugly mess, and built for the convenience of commerce, rather than for the delectation of cultivated eyes. Philadelphia is a Gemini city—and the inversions and ironies about the way Philly looks up close are profound and twisted. Cursed for a century with a self-hating, self-defeating press corps, Philly becomes as famously ugly as Detroit, Houston, or Phoenix. The truth is that Philly may be the most ambient city in America. There are too many visual feasts which Philly presents (and that are conspicuously absent in New York, Chicago, etc) to dismiss comparisons not only to the rest of America but to Paris, London, and Prague. Speaking of “ambience”; it’s a term with French connotations, as it signifies a certain ineffable charm places can have, and rational, thoughtful Brits (if not my blood-fellows, the Irish) do not care for the vagueness of raw sensation and charm. You could call ambience “visual mojo” and it would mean the same thing. Philly’s visual mojo works profoundly on many levels—one

key aspect is that, in some neighborhoods, Philly makes dilapidation look ambient. This is especially the case if a practiced eye selects and captures a synecdoche of the visual mojo, as Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum has done in “South Philly Power Lines.”

The issue of chance and composition is important here—that, as sophisticated flaneurs know, daily life has in it vistas opening onto the gorgeous and the spectacular, if you know where and how to look, and the manner in which you look can spontaneously create painterly compositions par excellence. This “found” composition is bizarre, and unique to South Philadelphia—horizontals and verticals (including gaudy holiday decorations) set against a crepuscular sky (which creates its own ambience of expectation and natural dynamism) in such a way that all the urban detritus is etherealized and thus made delicious and sublime. It also oddly balances humanism and naturalism—the sky and the power lines achieving consummation and fertilizing each other. South Philly, especially the Italian Market neighborhood where Jeremy took this, has the visual stock-in-trade of glamorous dilapidation—the streets and shops look pleasantly weathered, and there has been little renovation over the past half-century. The ambience which subsists in the Italian Market is timeless, and closer to the earth than almost any neighborhood in Manhattan. The twentieth century encouraged extreme renovation in urban America—certain parts of Philly saw the wisdom in rebuffing the trend from the inside.

You can still buy fruits, vegetables, fish and fowl from street-stalls in the Italian Market on weekdays—renovation and modernization have left its folkways intact. Having an eye which actually chooses to see the city you live in is a folkway which has largely been lost over the last half-century in America—and that sense of ocular interest merits some renovation. What “South Philly Power Lines” does is to create a sight matrix around Philadelphia, and challenge other artists in other places (particularly in once-vaunted, fading New York) to see if they can artistically encapsulate other sight matrixes. I myself don’t know if this can be done anywhere in America other than Philadelphia. I’ll wait with some eagerness to see what New York does in response. If New York, with its wonted bloated pomposity, chooses to ignore this, it will languish, because Jeremy’s pictures (and other PFS work) are a watershed moment in American art. This particular piece has the uncanny charm of making the humble grandiose.

Adam Fieled, 2013



ON “PORTRAIT OF MIKE LAND” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

To say something about the relationship between Mike Land and Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum—I don’t know how far it went. They might’ve been lovers. That’s certainly what this portrait suggests. When we were together as a threesome without Nick, we would sometimes do queer-consonant things. Upstairs at the Khyber, they had a DJ night in the mid-Aughts called “Feytality.” I went once with Mike and Jeremy. It was the Smiths, the Kinks, Belle and Sebastian, and New Romantics stuff. Where Mike Land and queerness were concerned, there was no doubt about it—he was active. With Jeremy, I could never tell—he had all kinds of wistful boy-crazy fantasies, but also liked to keep his options open about what he was willing to divulge and what he wasn’t.

What this portrait expresses to me is tenderness and reciprocity between the two artists. Mike could be tender in more than one sense—he could express a caring kind of tenderness towards others, and he had sore points and needed to be handled gingerly, too. Jeremy was a raving lunatic in comparison—he expressed tenderness in his art if not his life. All those levels were awkward for me, both towards Jeremy and Mike—most of my tenderness was directed towards women. When I first met Jeremy, years before PFS, and he

would suddenly act flatulently gay, I'd get embarrassed. But I also suspected he was faking it, and gayness for him was just another artificial posture. In hindsight, I still don't know if this was true. So much of this history and its participants is now lost in the bars of Manayunk and Roxborough that it may never be retrieved—Jeremy was loud, but conversely by far the most secretive of the four of us, and his posturing was used to willfully obfuscate whatever was really there. Mike, in the right context, would hit you with his bisexual seduction routine in twenty minutes flat. As twisty as his wallet was, with sex he was an above-boards player, an all-purpose one, and a consummate one too.

When Mike and Jeremy were “on,” Nick became a comically nervous child. I, a firmly straight man with an intellect and a college (in the UK, university) education, was a palliative for him then, up to and including our visits to Woody's, where Jeremy's hamming was used to cover...what? Make no mistake— at Woody's, Mike was the meat man. Jeremy would be happy to tell you how jealous he was, so you would know he really wasn't, and would chunder on like Oscar Wilde, not that he was like Oscar Wilde, etc. Mike's moves always fed part of Jeremy's soul and made him garrulous. My trick at Woody's (I taught it to Nick) was not to look anyone in the eyes too long; bury your head in your drinks. I was comfortable, but wary. Jeremy was right— Mike was entertaining to watch.

Mike was entertaining to watch with girls, too. He was good at taking calculated risks— what his hands were doing was the secret. I never saw him make a pass too fast, or too slow. He was graceful and agile, and, the way their unique chemistry worked, Jeremy would (for once) hold himself in reserve and talk to others as he watched. The panic button for me was this: if Mike makes a score, I get left alone with Nick and Jeremy together (a handful of chalk and a handful of cheese). It was like trying to mediate between Oscar Wilde and Charles Darwin. I wonder if Jeremy's left any records of “did he or didn't he.” Knowing how querulous he was about staging ambiguities, probably not. Ambiguities and artifice were part of his crab shell; all those hidden Manayunk side-streets were a rather formidable crab-shell too. In art, Jeremy was certainly Mike Land's lover. He could express the tenderness he may or may not have been able to express physically (to Mike or anyone else). The truth is rarely pure and never simple— perhaps sometimes he did and sometimes he didn't. Or, perhaps the breeder here should just shut up.

Adam Fieled, 2013



**ON “AT THE MANAYUNK TRAIN STATION” BY JEREMY ERIC
TENENBAUM**

Three of the four major Free School guys were based in Center City Philadelphia. Jeremy was the only one based somewhere else—in Manayunk/Roxborough, a section of

the city hinging on the Main Line and northern suburbs. Manayunk has a special glamour against both the suburbs and Center City— although the whole of the ‘hood consists of one thoroughfare (Main Street) and a dozen side streets running perpendicular to it. Main Street has posh boutiques, restaurants, bars, art galleries, and even a pool hall— all standard stuff, but torqued towards enchantment by how Main Street looks. New York has no parallel, nor does L.A.; Chicago has Wicker Park and North Milwaukee Avenue (the best, most precise analogue I’ve seen to Manayunk); D.C. has Adams Morgan; and London, Convent Gardens. Main Street, for a popular section of an American metropolis, is charming and quaint; none of the buildings which constitute the block are more than two or three stories high— and because Main Street does not sport many chain retail outlets, many of the facades and awnings are distinct and unique.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Manayunk has its own art scene— sort of. When I moved to Philly at precisely the turn of the century, Jeremy (the first of the three other foundation Free School guys I met; had, in fact, met in Manayunk in ’97 on a semester break from PSU) was trying to jump-start Manayunk on this level, with a crew of poets and artists around something called ‘d’ magazine. Jeremy had already set himself into a mold— he liked to create a scenario around him in which he got to “play papa” to a brood of adorable, borderline-twee young aesthetes, with tastes groomed and adjusted by him. This was one reason PFS was never that satisfying for Jeremy— as a Cancer, he liked to stay sequestered in Manayunk/Roxborough, and we were in Center City— and Mike and I were running the show. When Jeremy attempted to “play papa” with us, we just ignored him; and, with me at the helm, PFS was never going to be twee. As soon as PFS ended, Jeremy jumped back into a context not unlike ‘d’ magazine.

Still, Jeremy had a magical Cancerian quality for me of embodying the quaintness of Manayunk’s charm and glamour. The magical vista Jeremy creates in “At the Manayunk Train Station” is a collusion of the sacred and the profane, to create a startling composition, whose verticals and horizontals do a majestic trick against the starkness of the blue sky. Jeremy’s flaneur streak meant that he had a scattershot approach to art and photography— he liked to leave things up to chance. He always carried around a digital camera with him, and whenever we’d drink in Manayunk, he’d snap and click away. I had my own quirky feelings about Manayunk— for some reason, it only “worked” for me during the spring and summer months, especially spring. Main Street Manayunk in May is one vision of heaven I have. Jeremy had an uncanny ability in Manayunk to blend into the scenery to such an absurd extent that he might as well have been one of the boutiques, after one of which I named one of my best songs— “Worn Yesterday.” “La Tazza,” where Jeremy set up shop on Cotton Street, was also one of the last places on the East Coast Jeff Buckley performed before he drowned in ’97. In Center City, it was never as good. Jeremy, also, was only at his best in Manayunk, where I saw him many times— I’m not sure Mike or Nick ever did.

The sadness of Manayunk, if its there, is that small places tend to engender small lives— and, if you aren’t willing to make an effort to expand, if you just submit passively, your life may contract into nothingness if you remain there. The shell which protects also confines. Yet Jeremy had his moments and his visions, and if I can make the good ones stick, I see no reason not to.

Adam Fieled, 2013



ON “MIKE LAND AT THE DIVE, SOUTH PHILLY” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

The specter of alcoholism did loom over the Philly Free School—less so for me than for Mike, Nick, and Jeremy. Mike and Nick were perpetual barflies—it was a lifestyle choice they made (not only was Anna Land also a barfly, the whole Land clan had booze in their blood). The bar scene in Aughts Philly did have a hinge to glamour (I often wondered if it did in preceding decades), and, if you hit the right bar at the right time, you might think you’d found a racy version of Shangri-La. That’s what I get from Jeremy’s portrait of Mike at The Dive in South Philly in the late Aughts—a sense of celestial peace. Given the contexts in which he lived, it was an odd quirk of Mike Land’s character (not shared by Anna) which I often noticed—he could be peaceful and, given the right congenial reception (especially if it included free drinks or weed), knew how to relax. He was also openly critical of my workaholic approach to the arts, and was wont to laugh at how overextended I was. On the other hand, I would note to myself, he was only too happy to take advantage of my workaholism and make his mark as my numero uno wing-man in the Philly Free School.

Where bar-stool *savoir faire* was concerned, I couldn't compete—Mike Land had “it” and I didn't.

Though it skirts viciousness to say so, Jeremy really didn't have either—he was only creative intermittently, and his bar-stool style was too bizarre and blubbery to attract many acolytes (Mike and Nick, especially together, were never at a loss for acolytes). He'd appear to be digging in to some obscure French literature and repeatedly shoot nervous glances in all directions. In some ways, Jeremy never got over being a narcissistic adolescent—he always acted as if everyone was watching him. If I had a bar-stool flaw, it was lechery. If I saw a woman I fancied, I'd get twitchy, wanting to approach her and being paranoid that someone would beat me to the punch. Mike Land was more casual and less urgent about such biz, and Nick was relatively lust-innocent. By the time Jeremy snapped this portrait, the square had collapsed utterly. When Mike would visit from L.A., he kept a low profile. I'm guessing (though I don't know) that Mike and Jeremy ran into each other at The Dive by chance.

Jeremy, by the late Aughts, was a blubbery character in general. He was desperate enough to call his then-newfangled reading series “Toiling in Obscurity,” and affix the tagline “even our minor accomplishments are overshadowed by our utter anonymity” to ads for it. It seemed to me he never recovered from the Free School years; nor was he big or mature enough to admit it. Jeremy was a slave to emotions he pretended not to have. Mike, who was raised by a therapist mother and had a candid streak, less so. Mike's gaze here is candid—it seems to be a moment of respite from worldly concerns for him. The animating contradiction of the portrait is between earthiness and ethereality. That the peace of heaven could descend upon a bar in South Philly is interesting—Mike's facial expression and the perfectly balanced (and painterly) composition have something ineffable in them.

It's a captured moment of visual ecstasy with many levels of torment behind it. I never saw Jeremy in an ecstatic mood—he was supremely self-conscious, and went out of his way to impose his vision of artifice on everyone. Jeremy's camera eyes were better than he was. This is a night which I would've ruined for Jeremy had I been there. I was already doing grown-up things like putting out books and reading in foreign cities. Some of my books were being taught at major universities (I mentioned this in a conversation I had with Jeremy at around this time). By being grown-up, I had broken Jeremy's sacred faith of Peter Pan-ism. We mutually considered the other's gold foolish.

Adam Fieled, 2013

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c. Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum

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